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# Recent Succession Ceremonies of the Emperor of Japan

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Japanese imperial successions consist of three contexts of ritual and ceremonial: the *senso*, the *sokui rei*, and the *daijō sai*. Each of these is described for the successions of the Emperors Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa. Changes are identified, notably the introduction into the latter two of traditional elements giving them increased religious content. Interpretations of the symbolism and meaning of the succession have hitherto been confined to an examination of the *daijō sai*. Two approaches are identified. One is based on classical codifications and recorded instances of procedure. Here, the ritual centres on the partaking of food by the Emperor and the *kami*, thereby strengthening the spiritual power of the former. The other is based on myth and legendary history and interprets the *daijō sai* as the occasion for the transfer of an imperial soul through the transformation and rebirth of the Emperor. The article proposes an interpretation which, by contrast, embraces all three contexts, namely, that the main theme is of the successively closer communication of the Emperor with the *kami* in each of these. Finally, the nature of the Emperor's elevation is considered, being related on the one hand to more general notions of divinity among the Japanese, and on the other to similar contexts in Hindu kingship. The conclusion is that succession rituals involve a temporary and contextual divinity, which may then overflow into a more general elevation or sacredness, and that the Japanese case is an example of a situation also found in other monarchical successions.

*Keywords:* SUCCESSION, SENSO, SOKUI REI, DAIJŌ SAI, EMPEROR

## INTRODUCTION

The ceremonies surrounding the succession of the Emperor of Japan provide an extensive and complex subject, which can be approached from several directions and at different levels of enquiry. Much depends, of course, on the interests and qualifications of the writer: and I start, therefore, by specifying these in my case.

An Indianist by specialisation, my interest in the Japanese imperial succession was awakened by a study of the ceremonies by which rulers succeeded each other in the last decades of the Hindu princely states in pre-independent India. In a paper on the subject (Mayer, 1985), I briefly alluded to similar material on the modern British monarchy and suggested that the subject of royal succession would repay comparative

study. It was clear to me that in any such study the Japanese case would rank high, not only because of the remarkable continuity of its imperial line, but also because of the richness of the symbolism surrounding the ceremonies and the changes made after the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

My background in making such a study, then, is as someone interested in the subject in general, rather than as a specialist student of Japanese culture. Thus, it seems sensible to take only a part of such a wide subject and focus my attention on successions in modern times—that is, on the three successions of the Emperors Meiji (1868), Taishō (1912) and Shōwa (1926). It is not yet possible to study the succession which is presently taking place; but I hope that what follows will provide a useful background for such a study.<sup>1</sup>

I have two aims. One is to outline the key events and trace their development in the three successions. This is, I believe, the first attempt of its kind. For other writers have either described one succession in detail (Holtom, 1972; Hoshino, 1968) or else have considered questions about the succession without linking them to any specific contexts. My account indicates that there was, at the Emperor Meiji's succession, a break from what had gone on in the past, and that this was carried further in subsequent successions. The changes were partly those of omitting previous elements and partly of adding new ones which were themselves in a traditional idiom: and it is this mixture which has enabled commentators to emphasise different elements in the whole and thereby to interpret the rituals in different ways.

My other aim is to consider these interpretations and put forward my own. Almost without exception, the former have focussed on a single aspect of the succession, the *daijō sai*. My approach, on the other hand, takes into account the whole series of ceremonies and rituals involved: and I base my interpretation not only on the ethnography of what is said actually to have happened, but also on the changes made for the two most recent successions. Moreover, I suggest that the ritual idiom and the beliefs which underlay the successions should be placed in the context of the relevant rituals of the ordinary people. That is, the imperial rituals should be seen in some respects as aspects of a general pattern of beliefs, though writ large.

My conclusion is that the sequence of events in the two most recent successions is one which focusses on drawing the Emperor into an increasingly close communication with and relation to the deities. This cumulative theme runs counter to the view that there is a transformation of the Emperor at a culminating ritual, namely, the *daijō sai*. And I suggest that, when seen in the more general context of the relations

<sup>1</sup> Research was carried out in Japan for 3 months in 1987-8 with the generous support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and The British Academy. My thanks are due to the many persons who aided and advised me in Japan and the U. K., notably Prince Mikasa and officers of the Imperial Household Agency, Professors Chic Nakane, W. G. Beasley, Naofusa Hirai, Takakuni Hirano, Eisuko Kuroda, Toru Matsui, Yasumasa Sekine, Shinji Shigematsu, Shigeharu Tanabe and Tetsuo Yamaori, and to my translators, especially Messrs Hiroshi Honda and Kazuo Kumata and Miss Hiroko Kawanami. None is of course responsible for the views put forward in this paper, nor for the lacunae stemming from my being a non-specialist.

of Japanese to the spiritual world and to the elevation that such relations can involve, the Japanese succession is comparable to the patterns of royal succession in other monarchies.

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The 'Great Ceremonies' (gotaiten or gotairei) which I consider are made up of three parts, the *senso*, *sokui rei* and *daijō sai* successively. These can in English be termed the accession, the enthronement (although there is more than this involved), and the installation (this is an inadequate term for the 'Great new food festival' but I have found no better one). These events occurred over a period of several years after the death of the late Emperor, the dates in question being:

Table 1. Dates of successions (Gregorian calendar used)

	Meiji	Taishō	Shōwa
Senso	13.2.1867	30.7.1912	25.12.1926
Sokui rei	27.8.1868	10.11.1915	10.11.1928
Daijō sai	27-30.12.1871	14-18.11.1915	13-17.11.1928

It is a truism to note that the form of the ceremonies which made up these events, and the sanctity of the persons and objects involved, cannot be understood without a reference to the founding myth with which they were intertwined (see e.g. Ponsonby-Fane, 1942: 2sqq). More specifically, each of the events was particularly connected to a major feature of this myth. The accession centred on the Three Treasures (Mirror, Sword and Jewels) given by the Emperor's ancestress, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, to her divine grandson Ninigi no mikoto when he was sent to earth to rule the land of Japan, thereby emphasising these symbols of legitimacy and status. The enthronement had as one of its central acts the personal report of the Emperor to Amaterasu, thereby stressing his divine ancestry. And the installation had as its focus the sacred paddy given to Ninigi no mikoto from the heavenly fields of the Ancestress, to provide food and the knowledge of cultivation to his subjects - or, in another view, the coverlet (*ofusuma*) in which he was wrapped at the time of his descent to earth.

In the next sections I take each event in turn, starting with a brief description according to the official accounts (Kunaichō, 1968, 1918 and 1931 respectively, which I refer to as MT, TK and ST) and then adding my comments.

## THE SENSO

The Emperor Kōmei expired on January 30 1867 (by Gregorian reckoning). Four days later, his death was officially announced; and the *senso* ceremony took place ten days later. Quite simply, the Prince Meiji sat in the *seiryōden* hall of the palace; two female servants (*naishi*) approached with the Sword and Jewels, proffered (*hō jiru*)

them and placed them to the right side of his seat. The new Emperor (the word 'Tennō' is here used for the first time) announced the appointment of his seniormost official and then retired. Later, officials went to congratulate him on his accession, and the Shōgun sent a messenger with congratulations and gifts.

When the Emperor Meiji died in Tokyo at 0043 on July 30 1912, there followed the procedure laid down in the Imperial Household Law and the Ordinances governing accession which had been drawn up in 1899 and 1909 respectively. Accordingly, the new Emperor ('Tennō' is used here) went to a hall in the palace at 0100. The Sword, the Jewels and the two Seals (the national (*kokuji*) and the Emperor's (*gyoji*)) were brought in by (male) chamberlains and placed by the Lord Privy Seal (*naidaijin*) on tables in front of the Emperor. The Emperor made a slight inclination of the head (*goeshaku*). He then left the hall, preceded by the Sword and followed by the Jewels and Seals.

Simultaneously, at the *kashiko dokoro* (shrine of the Mirror) the chief ritualist (*shōtenchō*) recited a *norito*,<sup>2</sup> offered a sacred sprig (*tamagushi*) on the Emperor's behalf, and then made an announcement (*otsugebun*) of the accession, when bells were rung by a female temple servant (*naishi*).<sup>3</sup> He then went to the nearby shrines of the imperial ancestors (*kōreiden*) and the heavenly and earthly *kami* (*shinden*) and at each recited a *norito*, offered a sprig and made the announcement (though without the ringing of the bells). During the same day, a name for the new era was decided upon and it was decreed that it should start at the forthcoming midnight.

Next day there took place the Audience of the proclamation. Standing, with the Sword and Jewels on each side, the Emperor delivered an address (*chōken*) which proclaimed that he had acceded and promised to maintain the laws and traditions of his ancestors. The Prime Minister replied with thanks and respect, and he was followed by other Ministers saying the same thing. The Emperor's acknowledgement (*keirei*) concluded the ceremonies of the *senso*.

However, the demised Emperor was not regarded as being fully dead, although the new Emperor had now acceded. For his obsequies were conducted according to the Shintō rites of *mogari*, a funerary procedure now revived after more than a millenium of Buddhist mortuary ritual (Yamaori, 1984; Mayer, 1989). For 45 days his body lay

2 I use the Japanese word 'norito' because a range of meanings is attached to it which cannot be translated by a single English word. It is defined, for instance, as 'an ancient prayer' (Ross, 1965: 67); a 'form of paying respect and expressing gratitude' (Mason, 1935: 92); a 'ritual' (Bock, 1970: 2); and an invocation (Yamaori, pers. communic.). Since many references to *norito* in the literature are not accompanied by texts, it seems best to leave the word untranslated and have the reader assign a meaning from the context within the general view of a *norito* as being a communication with the *kami*. Similarly, I refer to the Japanese term '*kami*' rather than to a translation such as 'deity, god/goddess', etc. Partly this is because *kami* is a very wide concept, referring to the divine force to be found in natural objects as well as to specific human and divine manifestations. Partly it is because it can refer to one or many, male or female, and this indefiniteness should in some cases be retained.

3 This is not recorded for the Meiji *senso*, although it occurred in accessions both before (Webb, 1968: 103) and after it.

in state, the accompanying rituals including his being offered food 'as if he were still living' (Fujitani, 1986: 249). Only after that period was his spirit thought to have detached itself and the funeral took place, the same procedure being followed for his successor.

The Emperor Shōwa's *senso* followed closely the lines of his predecessor's, according to the codification. The Emperor Taishō had been ailing for some time, but his death was unexpected when it took place at 0125 on December 25 at his country palace at Hayama. Perhaps because of this, and also because of the need to coordinate the simultaneous ceremonies in Tokyo and Hayama, it was not until 0315 that the Emperor (the title 'Tennō Heika' is used) entered the hall in procession, the Sword, Jewels and Seals were brought before him, the Lord Privy Seal bowed, and the transfer of the Treasures occurred. At the same time as this ceremony, again, the chief ritualist went before the *kashiko dokoro* in Tokyo and announced the accession. Similarly the new era was proclaimed later that day, it being decreed that the last day of the Taishō era should be the first one of the Shōwa era. Three days later, the Audience of the proclamation took place in the main hall of the Tokyo palace before some 3000 people.

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It can be seen that the Taishō and Shōwa *senso* differed in several respects from the procedure at the Meiji succession. For instance, the length of time between the demise of one Emperor and the *senso* of the next was 14 days for Meiji, by contrast to 17 minutes for Taishō and 110 minutes in the case of Shōwa—reduced to 35 minutes if the interval is taken from the time of the public announcement of death (Inose, 1983: 40). The much shorter intervals of the later successions were partly due to the idea, derived from western monarchies, that the king/kingship never dies and that therefore a designated heir should be deemed to have succeeded by descent from the moment of the late monarch's death. This is what is implied by the use in the accounts of the word 'Tennō' to designate Taishō and Shōwa even before the transfer of the Treasures had been made to them (note that Meiji was called 'Shinnō (Prince)' during that time and that he had not been invested as Crown Prince). Again, the Audience of proclamation is not mentioned for the Meiji succession. By holding the proclamation in front of a large assembly, Taishō and Shōwa might be said to anticipate the proclamatory role of the *sokui rei*; and I think this is an indication of the changing nature of the *sokui rei* as well, from being largely proclamatory to being more religious in nature.

There are other differences, such as the introduction of *mogari* and that the Treasures were brought to the Emperor Meiji by women, but that later this duty was performed by males: however, the central feature of all three was the same—the transfer (*togyo*) of two of the Sacred Treasures to the new Emperor. 'Transfer' seems to be an appropriately neutral word for what happens: If we compare the three accounts, we see that Meiji's says, simply, that the ritualists proffered them and set them by his side, no note being made of any acknowledgement or action by the

Emperor. Similarly, the Treasures are said to have been set down before the Emperor Shōwa with no explicit response on his part. Although, in the case of Taishō, the Emperor is said to have made a slight inclination of the head, it is clear from the description that the Emperor did not actively 'take possession' of the Treasures. On the other hand, I was told, he was not being given them by any human agency, i.e. by the people who actually carried them in and placed them before him, nor by any other person: for there was nobody of higher status than the Emperor who could do this. Rather, as one scholar told me 'they come to him . . . on behalf of the deities . . . So, his passiveness is natural' (Hirai, pers. communic.). However, the actual result was that the Emperor 'possessed' two of the Sacred Treasures, and was thereby seen to have acceded.

The ceremony did not include a transfer of the third Treasure, be it noted. And the imperial announcement (*otsugebun*) made simultaneously at the *kashiko dokoro* was not made by the Emperor himself. In fact, the announcement did not apparently mention a transfer at all. The Shōwa announcement, for instance, said that the position of the Emperor should not be left vacant and 'though with sadness, in front of Amaterasu Ōmikami, the seat of state of the Emperor is to be succeeded by me and I proclaim that I am now succeeding'. It then went on to praise the Goddess and other *kami* and to ask their and the ancestors' help in ruling and maintaining brotherhood with other nations. Rather than representing a transfer and 'possession' of the Mirror by the Emperor, I believe that, through the mediation of the Mirror, the Emperor established a relationship with Amaterasu Ōmikami of an exclusive kind. This view is, I think, supported by the fact that there were subsequent announcements at the shrine of the ancestors and the shrine of the *kami* of heaven and earth: here, too, new relations were established with the *kami*.

The differences which I have noted between the Meiji and the later *senso* concern either less important matters, or the problem of continuity in the succession. The central focus of the *senso*, on the other hand, remains very much the same. But this is not the case in the *sokui rei*, the second of the succession contexts.

## THE SOKUI REI

The Emperor Meiji's enthronement took place in the throne hall (*shishinden*) of the Kyoto palace. The throne (*takamikura*) was placed at its centre, curtained from the vast courtyard, and to this the Emperor came in procession, preceded by the two Treasures. The act of mounting the throne was not made publicly, and it was as an enthroned ruler that the curtain was raised and the Emperor revealed to the assembly. The proceedings started with offerings (*hōhei*) made to the *kami*: then an imperial message (*senmei*) was read: a proclamation (*yogoto*) was made about the creation of the emperorship and its relation to the mythical past: and finally a 'great poem' was pronounced. Thereupon the curtain was lowered and the Emperor retired.

Like that of Meiji, the enthronements of Taishō and Shōwa centred on the imperial palace: but, unlike his, they had two locations. One was the *shishinden* and the other

was the shunkōden, a shrine in the courtyard near the shishinden where the Sacred Mirror had been installed upon its arrival from Tokyo. The first part of the sokui rei was held in the morning at the shunkōden and consisted of the 'Ritual in front of the Sacred Mirror' (kashiko dokoro omae no gi). After preliminary rituals the Emperor came, clothed entirely in white and looking 'very godly' (TK: 271), being preceded by the Sword and followed by the Jewels. Entering the inner chamber (naijin) he took a sacred sprig, made a deep bow (gohairei) and made the announcement (otsugebun) of the accession. A female ritualist rang the bells—possibly simultaneously, if not then immediately after the announcement. 'Everyone was moved, there was not a sound outside the building. Only the sound of the bells penetrated the silence. The sounds were respected as the appearance of the kami's power' (ST: 180). When this was finished the Empress (in Shōwa's case) made her worship and then the two chamberlains entered the chamber with the two Treasures, which they respectfully raised (hō jiru) in front of the Sacred Mirror before the Emperor retired in procession. In the Shōwa account, it is noted that at this time there was a ceremony of Reporting (hōkoku no gi) at the ancestral and heavenly shrines in Tokyo. Food and cloth were offered before the Emperor's envoy (chokushi) read an announcement (saibun) of the sokui rei's taking place.

In the afternoon the scene shifted to the shishinden. As at the Meiji sokui rei the Emperor (and here the Empress) were revealed to their subjects already enthroned, with the two Treasures to left and right. But now the Emperor himself read a speech saying that he had become Emperor and pledging himself to keep the traditions and protect the people. At its conclusion the Prime Minister made a speech of congratulation and called 'seitō banzai' three times, an acclamation in which everyone joined.

Simultaneously with this proceeding, at the shunkō-den there was held the ceremony of 'Raising the floor' (otoko age no gi). That is, just before the Emperor entered the shishinden, the floor of the kashiko dokoro was raised by placing several wooden frames (sunoko) on top of one another so that it was level with the throne in the shishinden. And, after the Emperor had left the shishinden, the floor was reduced to its usual height.

The sokui rei was completed by the ceremony of the Ritual of thanks (hōsai no gi) on the following afternoon. After preliminary offerings, the Emperor entered the inner chamber of the shunkō-den with the Treasures, took the sacred sprig and prayed. As he stood alone with bowed head (hairei) a female ritualist rang the bells. He made no spoken announcement on this occasion: afterwards, chamberlains reentered and proffered the two Treasures (in front of the Mirror). After the Emperor had left, a Princess offered prayers on behalf of the Empress. Thereafter, sacred music and dance (kagura uta) was performed for the next four hours, during which the imperial couple remained perfectly still in an inner part of the palace 'as if they were doing the service (hōshi) of the kami' (ST: 254).

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I have given highly compressed accounts of the three sokui rei; but I believe that



I have included the significant features for my limited purpose. These stem from the main difference between the Meiji and later occasions, in both location and content. That the Meiji sokui rei itself represented a break from the past, in that Shintō was substituted for Buddhist ritual is not relevant here. But it is notable that, in place of the simple offering and yogoto performed at the shishinden, a much more elaborate ritual (the omae no gi) had been organized in the shunkōden.

The significance of this ritual is said by the chronicler of the Shōwa sokui rei to be that the Emperor identified himself with the spirits of the ancestors, by announcing to the founding ancestor that he had acceded (ST: 178). The solemnity of this moment was shown in two features of the ritual. First, as Holtom has pointed out (1972: 53), it was the only time that all three Sacred Treasures were gathered in the same place. Normally, the Mirror rested in the kashiko dokoro and was not joined by the Sword and Jewels. Hence this announcement of Emperorship, insofar as it rested on 'possession' of the three Treasures, was literally more convincing than the previous position at the senso, when the Emperor was in the physical presence of only two of them. Note, however, that the actual announcement was made in the presence of the Mirror alone: only after this were the other Treasures brought into the chamber. It is as if the Mirror must here also be shown to have that superior place which is given to it by the fact that it is both a Treasure and also the manifestation of Amaterasu Ōmikami, and that communication to the kami must be in the exclusive presence of the Mirror.

Second, this was the first time in the accession that the Emperor himself spoke the *otsugebun*, for at the senso this was done on his behalf by the chief ritualist. Here, then, there was a directness of communication between the Emperor and the goddess. More than this, the announcement was underlined, made effective, by the ringing of the shrine's bells. In the innermost chamber (*nai naijin*) of the kashiko dokoro there is a string of 22 golden bells. When the *otsugebun* was spoken, the ritualist pulled the rope 99 times. This gave the announcement a special quality, and this may be why the Emperor, during the ringing of the bells, made an unusually (for him) deep bow (*hei fuku*) which was almost a prostration (Takahashi, 1987: 176). The bells rang 'as if to follow each word of the Emperor . . . It is said that the sound of the bell means that Amaterasu Ōmikami has surely heard the announcement of the Emperor' (*ibid.*: 176), and it is implied, given her approval.<sup>4</sup> However, in Hoshino's view (1968: 98) something more than acceptance and approval is involved. It is at this ritual that the 'transfer' of the Mirror takes place – or rather, that the Emperor receives ('*hōtai*' is used here, a word relating only to the receiving of a most sacred object) the spiritual power of the Ancestress and succeeding ancestors, and therefore that the process

4 This appears to be a special way in which the idiom of bells communicating with kami is used, i.e. as indicating acceptance of a message. It differs from the practice in some shrines, where the female ritualist will ring a bell over the worshipper's head as a 'purification' and as a symbol of 'grace' (Hirai, pers. communic.); or a bell may be rung by the worshipper to attract the kami's attention. Again, a set of hand bells is rung by female ritualists in a number of shrine festivals when they become possessed by kami.

which was started with the transfer at the *senso* is completed. It is this which leads Hoshino to say that at that moment 'the supreme ceremony [of the *sokui rei*] ... reaches its height ... and all we can do is look up at the brilliant divine light which fills both heaven and earth' (*ibid.*: 98).

At the very least, then, the *omae no gi* gave the fullest confirmation of accession, by the presence of all the Treasures and the direct approval of the Ancestress. It then remained not only to make this public but to show the Emperor's heightened status. This occurred at the *shishinden* ceremony, which centred on the enthroned Emperor and his announcement. It is entirely understandable that the act of mounting the throne was not important and took place behind the curtain and without ceremony. For by the divine confirmation through the bells, the Emperor had already been 'enthroned' that morning.<sup>5</sup> The important thing was the revealing of the enthroned Emperor to his people, holding his baton of office, and their confirmation through the acclamation 'banzai'.

Traditionally, the throne itself was not kept from one succession to another, although from Taishō's time the tradition of a permanent throne was adopted. I have found no evidence to suggest that the throne was itself more than a respected object: for instance, I have no record of an invocation made for deities to descend into it, or of particular rituals of respect or worship being made for it, as is the case for thrones elsewhere (Mayer, 1985: 208). However, the throne could be thought of as the seat of the ancestors, which also meant of course the seat of the Ancestress. As such it took on an aspect of sacredness. And this heightened state is surely to be linked to the simultaneous ritual of raising the floor of the *kashiko dokoro*. I have seen no explanation of this ceremony (the only writer even to mention it, Hoshino, does so without comment). But I suggest that it symbolises a homogeneity between the Mirror and the throne as seats of *Amaterasu*, for that period of time during which the two objects are level, and thereby gives the latter an additionally sacred character. Perhaps this is what underlies such remarks as that the throne bears the epithet 'amatsu (heavenly)' in its role as the seat of the ancestors (*ibid.*: 96); or that it is the seat of the *kami* brought from heaven to earth (Saigō, 1973: 148) or that it is a place equal to heaven (Orikuchi, 1955: 203). But if my explanation of the ritual of raising the floor is valid, then the corollary should also apply: that, when the floor of the *kashiko dokoro* is again lowered, the throne (and its occupant) are restored to an earthly level—though doubtless tinged with the sacred residue of that previous state, as were other monarchs after similar situations (e.g. Mayer, 1982: 146).

It is clear that the *sokui rei* cannot be seen simply as a political occasion for the proclamation of an accession, as some have done (e.g. Ellwood, 1973: 104). Hoshino

5 In this connexion, it is again perhaps significant that the time of the Report to the shrines of the ancestors and the *kami* of heaven and earth in Tokyo should have coincided almost exactly with the time of the *omae*, rather than with that of the later *shishinden* ceremony. If the latter had been the central act of enthronement, one would surely have expected the Report to have coincided with it, or come after it had occurred.

(1968: 96) points out that in earlier times the Emperor was not called Tennō, nor were his words that of an Emperor, until the sokui rei had been held, and hence the sokui rei completed the accession. In modern times, too, we have seen that, were the sokui rei merely to proclaim the accession which had occurred at the senso, this would have been at least partly preempted by the proclamation (chōken) after the transfer of the Treasures. It seems that the Taishō and Shōwa sokui rei showed that there had been an elaboration of thought about the relation of the Emperor to his ancestral kami and the intensity of his communication with them. And it is this theme which is above all at the centre of the third of the succession ceremonies; to which I now turn.

## THE DAIJŌ SAI

### a. Description

The daijō sai is both the most complex of the three contexts of imperial succession as well as the one on which commentators have almost exclusively focussed. Few changes occurred after the Meiji Restoration. Official accounts say that in some ways it was simplified: but the material shows little variation of the key happenings. I am therefore able to make a conflation of the three successions, using the ethnographic present and only reverting to the past tense when I deal with any specific event.

The daijō sai is in three parts and extends over four days. It is preceded by a number of rites which have to do with the selection of the two regions, known as Yuki and Suki, in which will be grown the rice to be offered as food and drink—the term daijō sai has been translated as ‘Great new food festival’—and with its cultivation and harvest. Rituals then surround the selection and construction of the sacred compound (daijō gū) and the construction of the two halls (yukiden and sukiden) in which the main rituals will take place, etc. I will not describe any of the above; for whereas they may be important for the general symbolism underlying the daijō sai, they are less relevant for my restricted purpose of studying the Emperor’s own part in the ceremony, and especially the relation of this to his succession.

The first day is devoted to the chinkon sai, translated as the ‘Ritual of the pacification of spirits’. The heart of the proceedings starts when the clothes and the sacred cord—it is of thick white silk, which Holtom calls the ‘life cord’ or ‘great life master’—of the Emperor are brought to a building (saiden) erected in the palace garden. As they come, a ritualist rings a bell and cries ‘make way’, just as if the Emperor were coming. The clothes and cord are placed on tables and the curtains round the building are rolled down. The chief ritualist and others clap their hands as a female ritualist climbs on to an object resembling an inverted tub (ukefune) holding a spear to which bells and a kind of vine are attached. She strikes the tub 10 times, the bells chiming, and each time she does so a male ritualist ties a knot in the Emperor’s cord. The cord is then put back in its box, the curtains are raised, and a ritualist shakes the clothes 10 times. The cord and clothes are then taken away, to the warning cry. This procedure was repeated for the cord and clothes of the Taishō and Shōwa Empresses (Kōgō) and in the Shōwa case also for the Dowager Empress

(Kōtaigo). After the Empress's clothes and cord have been taken away, sacred songs are performed at the shrine of Ōnaobi, a kami who 'rectifies all errors and sets all wrongs aright' (Holtom, 1972: 86).

Early in the evening of the second day, preparations are made of the interiors of the yukiden and sukiden. Especially, this means the installation of a couch or 'god seat' (shinza) of slabs of pressed straw, on which is placed a pillow, eight layers of reed matting, and a cloth of pure white silk called the ofusuma. A fan, slippers etc. are also provided.

Two days earlier the Emperor has undergone a ritual purification (misogi). Now, he takes two further purificatory baths. The three official accounts say that he then dons a special robe (sai fuku) of white silk (see also Ellwood, 1973: 135). However, Holtom writes that the Emperor Shōwa took his second bath whilst wearing 'a simple garment of hemp called the ama no hagoromo (heavenly feather robe)'; and in this he is supported by Saigō (1973: 141-2). This garment is not mentioned in the official accounts; but the conflict of evidence is less important than that the Emperor dons a special garment. At the very least it contributes to his state of great purity; and at the most, it is believed to have a considerable transformative effect, as I shall mention later.

The Emperor is now in a sufficiently pure state to proceed to the yukiden. This he does in that special procession which is the subject of perhaps the most famous picture of the daijō sai. He alone walks upon a long mat, unrolled before him and rolled up after he has passed; he is shaded by a sedge umbrella over which is a phoenix; and in front of him are taken the Sword and Jewels. He enters the outer chamber of the yukiden and sits whilst traditional music and songs from the Yuki region are performed, and a procession arrives, bearing the Yuki rice and rice wine as well as other foods. When it reaches the southern entrance of the yukiden, the Emperor passes into the inner chamber. Two women attend him, the baizen to serve him and the atotori to take the foods away. First they provide the Emperor with hand washing water. As to what follows, I can do no better than quote the most detailed of the three accounts (ST: 315):

The baizen goes forward and respectfully offers [the food and wine] to the Emperor. Then, with much respect, in front of the ancestral kami, the Emperor himself intimately offers the food and wine. After completing the offering and bowing deeply (gohairei), the announcement (otsugebun) is recited [by the Emperor]. It is 2040 and this moment is the most solemn, supreme and respectful moment of the rituals in the daijō gū. He himself performs the ceremony and shows great loyalty, great piety. The mind[s] of the great kami must have been very impressed<sup>6</sup> by this act. Next, they pass to the ritual of

6 The term translated as 'impressed' is 'kannō' which can also have the connotation of empathy. The implication is thus that, through the communication by the announcement, there has been a 'meeting of minds' between the Emperor and the kami.

onaorai. That is, the same kinds of food and wine offered to the kami are eaten (goshoku)<sup>7</sup> and drunk by the Emperor himself.

After the Emperor has eaten in the ritual of onaorai, he again washes his hands and the food is removed. Then the Emperor leaves the yukiden and proceeds with the Treasures to the palace. Before dawn on the following morning (i.e. on the third day) there follows a second ceremony at the sukiden at which foods and drink from the Suki region are offered. The accounts of this are very brief and only indicate that what takes place is a replica of what has happened at the yukiden. The duration of the ceremony at each place is between 2 and 3 hours, and by dawn the two rituals are finished.

The events of the second night form the climax of the daijō sai: but the three great banquets (taikyō) which follow it on the third and fourth days are an inseparable part of the whole. Traditionally, they formed a major part of the Emperor-making process, since the Sacred Treasures were presented to him at the first feast rather than at the senso, and the 'heavenly yogoto' (Amatsu yogoto) which was then declaimed provided an oath of loyalty, an expression of congratulation and a legitimization of status (Orikuchi, 1955: 207). Then, too, because the food at the first two banquets came from the Yuki and Suki regions respectively (though not from those fields which had supplied the rice for the previous night), the banquets replicated the Emperor's earlier eating in the presence of the kami in that the people ate special foods at the same time as the Emperor; and they also fulfilled the injunction placed upon Ninigi no mikoto, to distribute rice from the heavenly fields to the people of Japan. Because of this, the first two banquets were considered to be in the continuing 'sacred time' of the festival, with the final banquet, of a more mundane kind, being seen as providing a return to normal (gesai) (Ellwood, 1973: 139).

The banquets in the three daijō sai under examination conformed only partially to the above. The Emperor Meiji had only two banquets, in the first of which the Amatsu yogoto was pronounced, and in both of which food from the two regions was eaten, and rice wine drunk, by the Emperor together with his guests. But in the succeeding daijō sai only at the first banquet was rice from the regions served, western food and drinks being consumed at the other two; and the yogoto was omitted, although traditional songs and dances were performed. It seems that, at least for Taishō and Shōwa, the banquets continued as a way of 'winding down', but that the Emperor-making aspect had largely been lost.

\* \* \*

7 In the opening summary of the daijō sai given in ST (ST: 5), the term 'kenshoku' rather than 'goshoku' is used for the act of the Emperor at this point. The word was glossed to me as 'hear, digest, feel, taste'. Its use was thought to enhance the simple word 'eat' by stressing the internalisation of the food by the Emperor, who first tastes and then digests it.

Before I consider the interpretations of the daijō sai, I should perhaps comment on the core ritual in the yukiden and sukiden. Because this is highly esoteric, the official accounts provide us with no detail: and though Ellwood (1973: 139), Holtom (1972: 108-9) and Tanaka (1975:84, 90) give more material, this is not consistent, perhaps because they deal with different historical periods. It is clear, however, that if commensality is defined as the act of eating together, the daijō sai cannot be said to be commensal. For the Emperor eats after the kami, and there is even a gap, in the form of the prayer/declaration, to mark this. Again, if sacramentalised food is food which has previously been offered to a divine being, the food eaten by the Emperor in the part of the ritual called onaorai cannot be seen as strictly sacramental.

However, Japanese traditional thought did not flow in this precise way. Although the modern notion of onaorai means, in general, an occasion at which food offered to the kami is later consumed by the worshippers, the older version was rather that of eating food which had been cooked in a common container with the food offered to the kami (Hirai, pers. comm.). There is another difference, which underlies the belief that the only true onaorai is the one which occurs at the daijō sai and the ensuing annual first food festivals celebrated by the Emperor (Herbert, 1967: 174). It is that this onaorai is held during the actual ritual, not after it; that it is held in the inner-chamber, rather than in an outer hall as is usual; and hence that it is an integral part of the ritual, not a following adjunct (Hoshino, 1968: 90). It is this which makes sense of the statement (ST: 5) that 'in this way [by offering and by eating] the kami and the Emperor are merged (kiitsu)' - a single word being used for kami-and-Emperor (jinnō). Such thinking makes it irrelevant to distinguish the foods eaten as the 'same' or 'similar'. Literally they are similar, but notionally they are the same.

In situations of this kind, any invocation or dedication is important. For the implicit acceptance by the kami of such an invitation to receive the food makes the occasion one of communion. Whilst the secondary sources say little about this, the official accounts give it more prominence: and it should be noted that the dedication/announcement made by the Shōwa Emperor was said to have been the most important moment of the daijō sai. Furthermore, both the Taishō and especially the Shōwa accounts stress that it is the Emperor himself who makes the dedication, whereas in the Meiji daijō sai the announcement was made by the Grand Minister and not by the Emperor. It seems clear that a belief in the 'merging' of the Emperor and the kami was emphasised in the later successions.

## **b. Interpretation**

There are three lines of interpretation of the daijō sai's significance. First, there are those writers who look less at the content of the daijō sai than at its socio-political implications. Such are those who view the ceremony as a means of mystifying the Emperorship and thereby asserting the political dominance of the class which controls it. Or else, there is the view that the selection of the Yuki and Suki regions in different parts of Japan enabled the Emperor to represent the whole country in his partaking of rice from both regions, and thereby to overcome the traditional localisation by clan territory in ancient times, and that the ritual surrounding the new rice

replaced the older practice of moving to a new palace and capital at the start of each reign (Hirano, 1986).

My present topic concerns rather the second and third lines. One is the view that the *daijō sai* centres on the taking of food. Tanaka, for example, sees the ritual in the *yukiden* and *sukiden* as being the time when the Emperor gives hospitality to the *kami*. He provides food, a couch (*shinza*) to rest, fresh clothes and slippers, etc., just as would an ordinary Japanese for an honoured guest: and then, again following custom, he himself partakes of the food and drink which he has prepared and served to the guest, which can thus in no way be regarded as the *kami*'s leavings (*osagari*) (Tanaka, 1975: 142, 154 etc.).

But of course this is not an ordinary event; for the guest is an unseen and divine one. In such a context, Tanaka asks (*ibid.*: 165) whether we cannot say that the Emperor has a communion with the *kami* through this common food, and in fact becomes equal to the *kami*; and even a *kami* himself. Moreover, although the name, and number, of the *kami* are not specified in the texts, he surmises (*ibid.*: 156) that there is a chief one—for there is a single couch—and that this must be Amaterasu Ōmikami, for the *kami*'s food mat is placed so that it points towards the Goddess's main shrine at Ise. The purpose of the ritual is again an unsurprising one to him, within the context of Japanese ancestor worship—it is that of paying respect to the ancestor(s) as well as of praying to them for protection and welfare. Tanaka thus sees in the *daijō sai*'s core ritual a reenactment of hospitality, the forging of a relation with the *kami*, and an act of propitiation and a request for help.

Hoshino acknowledges this kind of interpretation, but his view is that it is a development from a somewhat earlier meaning which he himself adheres to. That is, he is one of the few writers who considers changes in the meaning attributed to the ritual, perhaps because he alone is writing not only from a knowledge of the classical sources but also from his personal experience (as a member of the Imperial Household) of the *daijō sai* of both Taishō and Shōwa. According to him, it is the eating by the Emperor which is the key to the *daijō sai*. Originally, says Hoshino, the Emperor's food mat was in the main position, rather than the *kami*'s; and the Emperor ate many different kinds of food (he is now said only to eat rice). However, the central item was the sacred rice, and from ingesting this the Emperor received spiritual power from the Ancestress, which enhanced his already elevated state due to his earlier purification.

Then, what of the offering of food and wine to the *kami*? Hoshino (1968: 101) sees this as having formerly been an oblation/libation (*saba*), which was simply a more elaborate version of the offering (*osonae*) of cooked rice customarily made by ordinary Japanese to the ancestral house shrine or to a deity. Hence it was not a communion or exchange of food between Emperor and *kami*; rather, it was a payment of respect before the Emperor performed the central act of ingesting the food and drink. In time, however, the *saba* was given more and more importance, and the central rite then shifted towards being the offering to the *kami*. The place where this ritual takes place should be given furnishing appropriate for a spiritually powerful person—i.e. with a couch etc.—but in Hoshino's view, this person is the Emperor. If

the daijō sai were only a ritual of thanks and prayers for protection and prosperity then why, he asks, is an Emperor who did not have this ceremony called a 'half Emperor (hantei)' ? But if it is about ingesting the sacred rice, this is understandable. And this explains the following banquets: for they are where the Emperor distributes the rice from the same regions to his people, and thereby spreads this spiritual power.

When we turn to the views of Saigō we see that, rather than stressing the ingestion of food, an explanation is sought in the symbolism of the couch and the coverlet (ofusuma) which are in both the yukiden and sukiden. These objects contribute to Saigō's view that the daijō sai is a rite de passage from which a new Emperor emerges, being at once reborn and in a sense reenacting the descent of the Divine Grandson from heaven (takama ga hara). For Saigō, in fact, the daijō sai is the enactment of events which take place in heaven. The renewing of all the buildings and their contents at each daijō sai (and their destruction thereafter) means, to him, that the ritual occurs in heavenly rather than earthly time (1973: 144). And it is held in heaven because that is the place from where the Japanese monarchy originated. Before the Emperor can attend the ritual, then, he has to ascend to heaven. His donning of the hagoromo robe during (or after) his purificatory bath is the means by which he accomplishes this (ibid.: 141)—for, according to myth, the hagoromo has this power (see Ellwood, 1973: 135 for the myth on which this power is based). From then on, says Saigō, the Emperor is on a 'heavenly plane', never stepping on the earth.<sup>8</sup>

To enter heaven is to enter a relationship with Amaterasu, which is what the Emperor does when he enters the yukiden, says Saigō (1973: 145). He then eats with her the rice from her paddy field. But though this gives the Emperor some spiritual power, Saigō does not think that it is alone enough to transform the Emperor (ibid.: 146). There must be a symbolic rebirth: and this he adduces from the presence of the couch. He goes on: 'this cannot be any other object than the one for sleeping. It is sure that the Emperor covered himself with the coverlet after the sacrament [taking of food] and must have engaged in the act of lying down. We can guess that, almost correctly, from various points' (ibid.: 146). The couch 'itself is Amaterasu Ōmikami' or 'is the same rank as Amaterasu Ōmikami.' 'By the act of lying there the king becomes the direct child of Amaterasu Ōmikami, that is, he is born again as the ruler who has power to rule Japan.' This is the decisive act of the daijō sai (ibid.: 147). Saigō goes on to consider the myth of the descent of the Divine Grandson. He is wrapped in a coverlet as a newborn child: this, says Saigō, is related to the wrapping of the Emperor in the coverlet whilst on the couch (ibid.: 148). And this in turn is symbolic of his rebirth as the new Emperor (ibid.: 149), and of course is related to

8 The *ascent* would explain the ensuing procession in which the Emperor alone walks on the unrolled carpet, his feet not touching the ground. But others interpret this procession as illustrating the *descent* of the Grandson to earth (Ellwood, 1973: 56). And yet others say that at that time the Emperor 'walks *between* heaven and earth' (Holtom, 1972: 104). The conflict between the italicised words shows the problems involved in making such interpretations. Without recourse to the myths, a 'neutral' statement would be, simply, that the procession shows the Emperor's heightened state of purity.



the descent of the Emperor to earth when the daijō sai is over.

The general theme of Saigō's analysis is, one would think, unproblematic. Indeed, a notion of transformation appears to underlie many royal successions. The difficulty enters when it is asked—how is this transformation effected, how is it visualised, and what are the actual actions performed in the daijō sai? I will return to this point when I have considered the approach of perhaps the most influential writer on the daijō sai, Orikuchi Shinobu.

Orikuchi's theme is similar to Saigō's but differs in emphasis. He is at one with Saigō in seeing the ritual of eating in the daijō gū as not containing the main significance of what happens: but, rather than rebirth, he focuses on the transmission of an 'imperial soul (*tennō rei*)'. The key to his approach lies in the *chinkon sai*, the ritual on the first day of the daijō sai. The name of the ritual is given in two characters which can be read as 'chin kon' or as 'tama shizume' or 'tama furi'. *Tama shizume*, says Orikuchi (1955: 385), has three meanings: a) the attachment of a (strange) soul to a body; b) the division of a soul into several souls (earlier this was called *tama furi*); c) the prevention of the soul's departure and its consolation. Using meaning a), Orikuchi says that the *chinkon sai* is a ritual in which the imperial soul enters the body of the new Emperor. This imperial soul is that same soul which was in the body of the Divine Grandson, and the passing of this soul from body to body is done through the shaking of the Emperor's clothes and the tying of the knots in his life cord. (The fact that the *chinkon sai* is also performed annually is said by Orikuchi to derive from the third meaning of *tama shizume*, i.e. it is a ritual of renewal of spiritual power in the imperial soul, which is believed to lose force over time and hence to require strengthening lest it start to depart from the Emperor's body.)

However, the *chinkon sai* is insufficient for a complete transfer of spiritual and bodily powers. The next stage occurs at the time of the purificatory bath next day and concerns the *hagoromo*. In Orikuchi's view, this is not a coverlet but rather a nether garment (*sundoshi*) tied up between the legs, which is 'to control the spiritual power and prevent it from escaping' (*ibid.*: 233). Orikuchi thinks that it is the taking off of this garment, after the purificatory bath, rather than its wearing during the bath, which is important, since the divestment releases the spiritual power of the Emperor. (He goes on to say that it also releases the Emperor's sexual potency and that the woman who unties this garment becomes his wife: This interpretation is denied by Saigō (1973: 241) who observes, somewhat critically, that 'the meaning must be judged from the usage [i.e. that it is the wearing and not the unfolding of the *hagoromo* which occurs in the actual event], it should not be used to serve for one's own ideas.')

Orikuchi sees a third stage as being necessary before the imperial soul is fully reconstituted. For him, the entry of the Emperor into the *yukiden* and *sukiden* at night symbolises the seclusion into which the Emperor traditionally went during the period in which the previous Emperor was physically yet not spiritually dead (i.e. the *mogari* period). At this time, the Emperor puts on the cloak or coverlet (*matoko ofusuma*) which lies on the couch. It is when he takes it off that he is completely the Emperor and the container of the imperial soul (1955: 196). (There is here a

resonance, of course, with the descent of the Divine Grandson who came wrapped in the ofusuma but, taking it off, became the ruler of Japan.) Thus it is not the lying on a couch which is infused with the Ancestress that makes him the true Emperor, as Saigō would have it: in fact, Orikuchi writes that the occupier of the couch is not the Ancestress at all, but rather a Stranger kami (marebitogami).

The authors whose views I have considered provide us with the two main approaches to the interpretation of the daijō sai. Others tend to agree with one of these.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Yamaori sees a series of contexts as being linked by a common theme, that of a cult of magical clothes (1985: 389). The clothes in the box at the chinkon sai, the hagoromo and the coverlet together mark the process of the transfer of the imperial soul to its new incumbent, ending in the 'sharing of bed and food' between kami and human being in the yukiden and sukiden (ibid.: 387). On the other hand, Mayumi (1986: 178) avers that the real meaning of the daijō sai is the eating of the sacred rice, by which the Emperor absorbs the spiritual authority of the sun which ripened it (and thus the Sun goddess). Traditionally, he says, the rituals were held at the time of the winter solstice, that in the yukiden being performed whilst the sun was still weakening, and then in the morning the food at the sukiden is taken and the Emperor is 'filled with young power as the revived sun rises' (ibid.: 180).<sup>10</sup>

Although not placing any emphasis on the couch and coverlet, those scholars who base their explanations on the eating together of kami and Emperor do not see them as obstacles to their interpretation of events. As I have said, Tanaka (1975: 136) sees these and other objects as used by the Emperor to show to the kami that same hospitality to an honoured guest as is traditional for all Japanese. Again, Hirai remarks (pers. communic.) that many Shintō shrines have sleeping equipment in the inner chamber: and Ellwood (1973: 134) gives an example of such a shrine, having 'a couch of tatami, a pillow and a small table remarkably similar to those of the daijō sai'. The suggestion is that the couch and coverlet are part of a more general idiom

9. An exception is Holtom who sees on the one hand 'the transfer of the Sacred Rice Spirit [as] the climax of a series of elaborate rites intended to protect and promote fertility' (1972: 116) but who on the other hand also says that the 'original Japanese enthronement ceremony' is 'concealed' in the daijō sai—a ceremony in which the Emperor went first to the throne (shinza) of the dead Emperor in the yukiden, took possession there of the Sacred Treasures, and was made the new Emperor on the throne-couch of the sukiden (ibid.: 117). By the term 'concealed' he seems to suggest that an aura of enthronement still remains in the daijō sai, although there is no such actual ceremony.

10. As Yanagita points out (1964: 377) adoption of the Gregorian calendar means that the ceremony is now held a month early and this symbolism is undermined. Mayumi and Holtom are among the few commentators who consider the duplication of the ritual in any detail. Others include Hirano (1986), who sees the dedication of rice from the two regions as symbolising the unity of the realm, and Bock (1990: 34), who suggests that a view of the daijō sai as being a symbolic death and rebirth involves the progression of the Emperor from a 'defiled [sic] hut of death (the yukiden)' to a 'new hut to be reborn' i.e. the sukiden. However, most authors allude to the topic briefly if at all, perhaps joining Ellwood in seeing it as 'another of those subtle and intractable mysteries of Shintō' (1973: 77).

of offering facilities to the kami in shrines, rather than that they are there for the Emperor's use.

The reader may now perhaps expect me to evaluate these points of view and pronounce on which of them I support. But I do not need to do this; for the accounts are in fact considering different daijō sai. The approach giving the central position to the food is mainly based on written codes such as the *Engi shiki*, and on what is believed actually to have recently occurred. It is about the daijō sai as it has existed since the 10th century. By contrast, the approach giving pride of place to the Emperor's rebirth or the transfer of the imperial soul bases this largely on myths and early accounts.

To understand this difference requires a brief outline of the history of the daijō sai. Scholars such as Tanaka speak of the earliest kind of succession as being contained in a single ceremony—that is, a combination of what later became the three separate events of the succession. No date can be given for this period (Tanaka, 1975: 253) but its existence can be inferred from descriptions of successions in the earliest accounts. Tanaka's view (*ibid.*: 258) is that such a ceremony occurred at the time of the autumn harvest. The new Emperor ate the new rice and was then presented with the Sacred Treasures and publicly given allegiance (through a *yogoto*). This ceremony was called, therefore, *senso-daijō sai*. Tanaka does not mention an enthronement at this time, but others (e.g. Holtom) would, I believe, include such an enthronement in this composite daijō sai: the throne being used, presumably, was that couch still extant in the *yukiden*.

By the 7th century A.D., however, the three events were becoming separate, and after the Emperor Temmu's accession in 672 the *senso* and *sokui rei* were separately performed (Kodama, 1978: 68). The daijō sai continued to have elements of accession contained in the presence of the Treasures and the *yogoto* at the banquet, but the element of enthronement during the rituals at the *yukiden* and *sukiden* had disappeared, certainly by the time that the detailed procedures were codified in 927 in the *Engi shiki*. Ellwood is thus able to say that neither the couch nor the coverlet 'are actually used or touched during the ceremony as it has been performed in historical times' (1973: 133). Moreover, since the presentation of the Sacred Treasures, and the allegiance proclaimed through the *yogoto* at the banquet, had now been anticipated in the *senso* and *sokui rei* ceremonies respectively, the daijō sai became increasingly a purely religious ritual, the first and greatest of a reign's annual harvest festivals (*niiname sai*) in which the Emperor ate of the new rice. This is indicated by the fact that the term 'half Emperor (*hantei*)' was applied to Chūkyō who in 1221 took over the Sacred Treasures but 'had not performed the public ceremony (*sokui*)' (Ponsonby-Fane, 1959: 264) before he was deposed. Note that it was the performance of the *sokui rei*, not the daijō sai, that was lacking. Moreover the daijō sai was not performed for some 200 years, since it was in abeyance from the time of Go-Kashiwabara (r. 1500–1526) until brought back on a small scale by Higashiyama in 1687 and continuously from Sakuramachi in 1735, the reasons being at first disorder and the poverty of Emperors, and later a prohibition by the Shōguns in order to decrease the influence of the Emperors (Ross, 1965: 80). Yet I have not seen it said

that all these Emperors were also entitled *hantei*. In fact at least one of them was considered to be 'divine' (i.e. Go-Mizunoo r. 1611-29, quoted in Creemers, 1968: 125-6); and Ponsonby-Fane says explicitly that Emperors during this period of lapse were thought of as being fully legitimate (Ponsonby-Fane, 1959: 350). In fact, Ponsonby-Fane goes even further when he writes of the *daijō sai*: 'This esoteric religious rite ... has in reality no connection with the accession of a new Sovereign' (ibid.: 350).

Ponsonby-Fane is writing about what might be called the 'middle period' of the *daijō sai* (though this consists of over 1000 years!). For the modern period of the Taishō and Shōwa successions, he acknowledges that the *daijō sai* 'has been, as it were, incorporated into the enthronement ceremonies' (ibid.: 350). It is with this most recent stage that I am of course concerned. In the more general context of the Shintōisation of the imperial ceremonial after the Meiji Restoration it is indeed reasonable to see the holding of the *sokui rei* and the *daijō sai* on one occasion on successive days as a reintegrating of the *daijō sai* into the succession.

But what kind of *daijō sai* was it that was thus integrated? It was, surely, the ceremony as laid down in the codes, in which it had been preserved during the 200 years of its abeyance, since this also corresponds closely to the modern official accounts. Some scholars refer to a 'secret oral tradition of palace ritualists', devoted to a ceremony involving the couch and coverlet, on the basis of which is based their view of the transmission of the imperial soul as the heart of the *daijō sai* (Bock, 1990: 32, 35); but the existence of any such ritual is denied by the ritualists of the Kunaichō themselves, who aver that food and not the coverlet or couch is at the centre of the action and meaning (Blacker, pers. communic.).

It seems that those who write about the Emperor's resting/sleeping on the couch and being wrapped in the coverlet are giving a picture of the presumed enthronement in the earliest *daijō sai*, before the separation of the *senso* and *sokui rei*. It is not to them significant that this procedure was not in the early codification, has not been mentioned for over a millenium, and to all available evidence does not figure in the present procedures. For the mere presence of the couch and coverlet indicates to them that this early enthronement is 'concealed' in the present ritual, or that one or other aspect of the founding myth is being reenacted, giving the underlying meaning to the ritual. By contrast, those who focus on the giving and eating of food are taking their material from the codification and, in some cases, from the accounts of recent *daijō sai*. It can be seen that the two are very different approaches and rest on different material.

An implicit assumption in the first approach is that the meaning of the *daijō sai* has not changed over the past millenium and a half. But one of the things that strikes the outside observer is that the Japanese do not seem to be afraid of making changes in their rituals—both changes in procedure and changes in the interpretations which they give to them. One has only to think of the changes in mortuary procedure after the Meiji Restoration, or the innovation of the ritual at the *shunkōden* in the *sokui rei*. These may be interpreted as a reversion to ancient practice and meaning, but they may also bring in new meanings. In short, I do not think that one can regard any

of the succession ceremonials as by definition unchanging.

As an example, I give the ceremony of the *chinkon sai* which, it will be recalled, was seen by Orikuchi as giving the key meaning to what followed. It will be recalled that Orikuchi sees the shaking of the Emperor's clothes and the tying of the knots in his 'life cord' as a way of starting the transfer of the imperial soul. On the other hand, another view, put forward by Holtom, is that the ceremony's purpose is to 'tranquillise the spirit of the Emperor and co-ordinate diverse psychological elements within him so as to equip him to pass safely through the momentous events of the following night' (1972: 86) and to 'effect a prolongation of the Emperor's life.' As to the coordination, he refers to the ancient Japanese belief that many souls inhabit a person's body; thus, the ceremony of tying the life cord would originally have been to restrain within the Emperor's body, at least for the period of the *daijō sai*, those of his souls which might otherwise have strayed and been absent at this critical time. Nowadays, however, he says that the ceremony is rather interpreted as being for 'tranquil spirits and long lives' for the imperial couple.

Now, one feature mentioned for the Taishō and Shōwa *chinkon sai* is that the clothes and cord of the Empress (and in the Shōwa case the Dowager Empress) were similarly treated. Following Holtom's interpretation, one could say that the Empress should also have the benefit of a tranquillising of spiritual strength, since she takes part in the next day's ritual to the extent of entering the *daijō gū*. And one could even allow, under this view, a tranquillisation of the Dowager Empress's spirit since, though she plays no part in the proceedings, this might add to the general spiritual atmosphere. In Orikuchi's terms, however, the addition of these women seems to be problematical. What soul is going to be transferred to them? Not, surely, part of the imperial soul, even though this I suppose includes the several regnant Empresses of the past? Nor does it appear that there is a 'consort soul' to be transferred—at least, Orikuchi does not mention such a thing.

It may well be that an explanation can be found for this under the terms of Orikuchi's interpretation. But if not, one may surely conclude that a different meaning has been given to the ceremony along the lines suggested by Holtom. And this shows that the ceremonies have changed in modern times and that the meaning of the *daijō sai* may not be entirely that which was 'fixed in Heian times' (Orikuchi, 1955: 238), let alone in the semi-historical time before that.

The official account of Shōwa *daijō sai* does not specify changes, simply saying that, on the one hand, the aim is 'to make the ritual as simple, but also as elegant as possible' (ST: 3) but also that it was 'done according to the very ancient way' (ST: 3). I am not sure what the latter means, since the actual procedure appears to have followed the later codification. The main comments of one who took part (Yanagita, 1964: 376-81) did not refer to a change in meaning, however. They were rather, first, that the proceedings were too grand, involving far more people than in traditional times and therefore needing larger and more elaborate buildings for a rite whose surroundings should be simple; and second, that it was too complex for the present day, and hence the rules of purification and avoidance were not properly observed. Yanagita's suggestions for a future *daijō sai* were, first, that not all traditional

practices should be retained—e.g. a discarding of the full complement of avoidances by the officials involved. And second, that it should be held at some interval from the sokui rei, so that the participants should have a suitable frame of mind for it. His view was that, by having them so close together (itself untraditional) there was a confusion of purpose in people's minds. A way of avoiding this would be to hold the sokui rei in November as had been done in recent instances, but move the daijō sai to its proper place at the winter solstice. But he then made a remarkable suggestion—that if the sokui rei and the daijō sai were to continue to be held consecutively without a break, then the daijō sai should be held first. I will return to this point.

I leave this discussion of the daijō sai with the perhaps unsurprising conclusion that the ceremony can have different meanings for different people, according to their approach. For those who interpret it in terms of 'ethnography' it is about the relation of the Emperor to the kami and about the strengthening of his spiritual power through the medium of the sacred food—and the couch and coverlet are there for the kami. For those who interpret it in terms of 'mythology' it is about the transfer of the soul and the rebirth (and enthronement) of the Emperor—and the couch and coverlet are key objects in this process.

My own approach is somewhat different, because I do not think that the daijō sai should be considered in isolation from the other events having to do with the succession—perhaps this is even more the case, now that the sokui rei and the daijō sai have become an almost continuous ceremony. In the concluding section, then, I shall try to look at all the events as a whole and draw out a theme which links them.

## CONCLUSION

What were the major changes brought in during the reign of the Emperor Meiji, as shown in the official accounts, which imply a new view of the imperial succession? In the *senso*: the theory of 'unbroken succession' is codified, the 45-day mortuary period is introduced, and announcement is made by a ritualist at the *kashiko dokoro*. In the *sokui rei*: the announcement of his accession is made by the Emperor himself at the *shunkōden*; the *kashiko dokoro* floor is raised at the time of the enthronement, and the enthronement is done without any religious ritual. In the *daijō sai*: the announcements in the *yukiden* and *sukiden* are made by the Emperor himself, and the banquets lack the *Amatsu yogoto*.

Two trends of change can be identified. One is towards a greater religious content, specifically a Shintō content. This emphasises the Emperor's descent from Amaterasu and the Divine Grandson, i.e. the founding myth—this trend being a concomitant of wider political changes involving the Emperor's place in the polity, which I cannot discuss here. The other is what might be called a westernisation of the succession, which gave it similar characteristics to what were seen to be those of the European imperial houses of the late 19th century.

If we look more closely at the additional Shintō content, we see that a pattern emerges, focussed on the nature of the communication between the Emperor and the

kami—more specifically Amaterasu Ōmikami. At the *senso*, the announcement is, it is true, an imperial one (*otsugebun*) rather than simply the more general *norito*. But it is read by the chief ritualist on the Emperor's behalf, rather than by the Emperor. The bells are sounded, but the ST does not put much emphasis on this fact. By contrast, in the ceremony at the *shunkōden* in the *sokui rei*, the Emperor himself makes the announcement, and great stress is put on the answering (and confirming) bells. Finally, the Emperor's announcement and dedication at the *yukiden*, made after the offering of food to the kami and before the ingestion of food by the Emperor, is said to be the most solemn moment of the *daijō sai*. These facts lead me to suggest that communication is the theme which links the three events into a single process of a cumulative kind, in which the Emperor becomes at each stage closer to the kami.

In each case, the act of communicating with the kami is marked by a concomitant event: in the *senso* by the accession to two of the Treasures; at the *sokui rei* by the enthronement and perhaps the transfer of the third Treasure; and at the *daijō sai* by the taking of the sacred food and later by its distribution to the people. Moreover, the location of each ceremony has an increasingly close physical link to the Ancestress. The *senso* takes place at a distance from the *kashiko dokoro*, the seat of the Mirror and the Ancestress; but the *kashiko dokoro* is in the same compound as the hall of the enthronement at the *sokui rei* and is linked to it by the 'sympathetic magic' of the floor raising; and the *daijō sai* brings the Ancestress into the very heart of the ritual.

Again, the cumulative nature of this process fits with the introduction of the *mogari* mortuary ritual. In the 45 days during which the late Emperor's body rests in the palace, his soul is slowly leaving the world, eventually becoming fully detached. Were the new Emperor to be fully an Emperor at the start of this period, at the time of the *senso*, there would be an ideologically anomalous situation of an 'overlap' between the two Emperors. But, if I am right, the new Emperor is not fully an Emperor during the time that the former Emperor is still partly one (see Giesey, 1960: 184 for a comparable situation).

Royal successions in other cultures also present a division into several parts. For instance, the modern Hindu ruler of Princely India, who followed traditional procedures of royal succession, had an initial accession ceremony; like the *senso*, this was performed before the funeral of his predecessor. It was followed by ceremonies which included political acknowledgement as well as a religious consecration. Again, the British monarchy has a ceremony of accession and proclamation, which is followed by a religious consecration and by homage paid after the coronation. In both cases, the religious rite is one of a spiritual infusion—for the Hindu king by the mounting of a throne or by the affusion of sacred substances, in the British monarch's case by the anointing with sacred oil.

In each of these examples, the monarch gains recognition and the linked level of authority and power in the polity. It is also clear that a spiritual elevation of some kind reigns during the key rites. But what is the monarch's status during the rest of the reign? For this must also be affected by the nature of the rituals of succession and can throw light on them. It is here we broach the question of the divinity of rulers.

As a former Indian Prince told me: 'When we pronounce from the throne, it is divinity. When we get off [the throne] we are only kings . . . [but] divinity, a little part of it, comes into the kingship part of it' (Mayer, 1982: 146). By this he meant that there was a spiritual overflow from his affusion and his contact with a throne which was filled with spiritual power, and that this made him in some way special, sacred though not divine.

Now, divinity manifested on such specific occasions as a royal consecration has, in the Hindu context, been termed 'marked' divinity (Wadley, 1975: 56). It is distinct from the 'unmarked' divinity attached to deities which are permanently divine. But the Prince was not alone in having marked divinity. Each of his Hindu subjects was, at marriage, considered to be divine: and a person in an act of worship was thought of as being 'deified' at the same time as the deity was 'humanised' (Fuller, 1984: 15), as part of the communication between them. Of course, the spouse and the worshipper reverted to a mundane status after being marked during these events. But the Prince, perhaps because of the special elevation and intensity of his period of marked divinity at the succession, as well as his annual marking at the Dassara ritual of renewal, retained some element of this state. And it was this overflow that led his subjects to see him as being blessed by the gods.

May we not see a similar situation in the Japanese case? May not the Emperor have had a marked divinity, possibly at the time of the shunkōden announcement and the later enthronement and certainly during the daijō sai—which was then renewed by his subsequent celebration of the first fruits festival (niiname sai) each year? And may he not have occupied for the rest of his reign a position made elevated by the spiritual overflow from these contexts? As Gluck (1985: 142) says, the Emperor Meiji was not generally worshipped in Shintō shrines as a living god (ikigami)—which I take to be an unmarked deity—until his enshrinement eight years after his death. And although he was considered by Shintō scholars to be arahitogami, a 'manifest deity' (ibid.: 142), Gluck notes that the populace saw him rather as an awesome and sacred person to whom one showed great respect. This sounds like an overflow of sacredness from marked contexts of divinity, and supports the Meiji Constitution's definition (in Article 3) of the Emperor as 'sacred and inviolable' rather than as 'divine'.

Such an alternation between contextual divinity and an intervening degree of elevation appears to be consistent with the Japanese view of the divine. For, as Kawai puts it, 'the distinction between god and man . . . the divine and the secular, is not so clear' (1958: 4). Every material object, animate and inanimate, is thought to have a spiritual dimension. Hence all human beings have both divine and mundane aspects. That the Emperor had more of the former was because of his sacerdotal functions, says Kawai—these being precisely those through which he was in communication with the unmarked deities and might be thought of as having a marked divinity at the time. 'The Emperor as an individual is a mortal man, but in his official capacity as Emperor-patriarch-priest he is the symbol of supreme authority . . . and thus enjoys a higher degree of sanctity than ordinary men. In this sense he is more of a god than other men' (ibid.: 5). In other words, although ordinary men could also attain a temporary state which seems to approximate marked divinity when, by taking



consecrated food at *onaorai*, they 'return bodily to their own spiritual state in God' (Herbert, 1967: 174), the Emperor's communication with the *kami* was closer.

One consequence of this permeable boundary is that 'it was as easy to demote a god to a man as to elevate a man to a god: it entailed no real change, but only a slight shift of focus'. Hence for the majority of Japanese, the Emperor's renunciation (*Tennō no ningen sengen*) of a divine aspect in 1946 is said to have evoked little reaction. They had 'known right along that the Emperor was a mortal man': but 'all humans are also in some sense divine. No proclamation could divest the Emperor of this kind of divinity' (Kawai, 1958: 12). His renunciation was perhaps similar to the practice of abdication, which had been normal during the previous millenium. For the abdicated Emperor reverted to a normal spiritual status (Creemers, 1968: 126 for an example, cited by the late Emperor), the level of sacredness during his reign thus being a contingent matter. The abolition of abdication after the Meiji Restoration put an end to this contingent aspect of Emperorship and gave the spiritual overflow from the succession rituals a more lasting status which at the time was made more elevated.

Perhaps one can identify a cross-cultural similarity in royal successions. This is that there are one or more occasions in which the new ruler is given a marked divinity, or a degree of spiritual elevation, which then gives a spiritual overflow to the status during the rest of the reign. In one monarchy the overflow may be so strong that the monarch is thought almost if not entirely to maintain a divinity throughout the reign; in another the monarch retains a lesser portion of this, seen as a degree of sacredness; and at the end of the continuum we find a monarch who is considered to be someone special, perhaps partly because of a consecration, but not to be sacred. Such a continuum not only exists between monarchies; it can be applied over time within a monarchy. It is a truism to say this, recalling the way in which beliefs about European monarchies have changed over the centuries. But it can explain any changes in the Japanese succession rituals, made to match the view at a particular time, as well as the existence of different views at any one time. These different views would then reflect beliefs about the meaning of the rituals. An example would be the difference in 1928 between those who saw the *daijō sai* as the most important and hence culminating ritual and those who, like Yanagita, could contemplate placing it before the holding of the *sokui rei*.<sup>11</sup>

Seen in this perspective, the succession ceremonies would not have changed the

11. Yanagita suggested this change as a way of having the *daijō sai* approached in the proper frame of mind, rather than by people distracted by the immediately preceding business of the *sokui rei*. Does this also imply that he shared the view expressed by Hoshino (who had also been present) that the transfer of the Mirror at the *onae* ritual during the *sokui rei* marked a supreme moment of the succession? If so, two progressive patterns of the three main parts can be identified. The first is the one I have proposed, being that of a cumulative communication and nearness to the *kami* (ending in the *daijō sai*); and the second is that of the recognition of the Emperor by the *kami* through the transfer of the Treasures (ending in the *sokui rei*). This illustrates the danger of trying to discover patterns in a series of events—or rather, the tentativeness with which such explanations should be put forward.

Emperor so much as heighten the 'divine' component which he, as a human being, already possessed. My suggestion is that they would have done this by his acts of increasingly close communication with, and hence relation to, the unmarked deities, notably Amaterasu Ōmikami his divine ancestress. It would not then have been a question of transformative accession to divinity, nor of a symbolic rebirth or a transmission of an 'imperial soul' at the daijō sai—indeed, since the daijō sai was not held for two centuries, an explanation which makes the latter a crucial and necessary feature would seem to deny the continuity of the imperial line. How this marked sacredness influenced his position in the wider polity during the rest of his reign varied greatly, as well as how it was interpreted; and it is this which is the subject of the debate which is now taking place about the present succession; and especially whether it is necessary to hold the daijō sai, and on what basis. For the rites are capable of various interpretations, and are in themselves neither immutable nor linked to any single meaning. Hence the meaning given to the present succession will doubtless continue the process of change and continuity which has characterised the three most recent successions.

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### 近代天皇の皇位継承儀礼

エイドリアン・C・メイヤー

**要旨：**天皇の皇位継承は、踐祚、即位礼、大嘗祭という三つの儀礼の流れから成り立っている。これらの儀礼はひとつひとつ、明治、大正、昭和の各天皇の皇位継承において記述されている。それらを比べると、変化が明らかであり、とくに大正、昭和天皇の継承においては、伝統的な要素が加えられて宗教的内容が多く含まれるようになったことがわかる。ところで皇位継承のシンボリズムと意味についての解釈は、従来、大嘗祭の研究にかぎられていた。そしてそれらに二つのアプローチがあった。第一は今の規定と祭儀の記録に基づくアプローチである。それによると天皇と神が食事を共にして天皇の精神的威力を強化することに儀式の中心がおかれているということになる。もう一つのアプローチは、神話と伝承に基づくもので大嘗祭を天皇の変容と再生によって天皇霊を継承する機会であると解釈する。この論文は、それらの方法とは対照的に三つの一連の儀礼を含めた解釈、すなわちそれらの儀礼において天皇と神がつぎつぎと密接に交流するプロセスを主たるテーマとする解釈を提示するものである。おわりに、天皇位の本質について考察する。それは、一方では日本人の間で一般的に抱かれている神の考えに関連し、他方では、ヒンズー教世界の王権における同種の問題にかかわっている。結論として、王位継承儀礼に含まれる神格的なものは一時的で相互連関的なものであるが、それはやがてよりいっそう一般的な高位や神聖性へと上昇していくということ、そして日本のケースは、他国の王位継承にもみられる状況の一例であるということ述べた。